



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Santa Fe National Forest officials seek to preserve traditional grazing while protecting endangered mouse habitat

August 22, 2014, Santa Fe, NM - Representatives from Santa Fe National Forest, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Range Improvement Task Force, and the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association met with dozens of local ranchers earlier this week discuss ways to sustain trans-generational grazing operations in the Jemez Mountains while protecting habitat for the endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. This meeting was the continuation of a conversation initiated by Congressman Ben Ray Lujan last week to discuss collaborative solutions.

"I was pleased by the discussion and the willingness of the ranching community to attend and improve our understanding of their concerns. I heard many good ideas that we intend to investigate more in an attempt to find a practical solution that can meet the needs of the ranching community and provide for protection of the mouse," said Maria T. Garcia, Forest Supervisor.

The Forest Service is mandated by law to protect the endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse and its occupied habitat. The mouse was listed as an endangered species in June. The mouse lives in lush riparian areas, and is only active for four months each year where tall grasses provide both food and shelter. This specialized habitat exists in several active grazing allotments.

The Forest Service proposed building a fence to protect the occupied habitat, but ranchers strongly contended that other solutions were possible. The group went to the field and had a robust discussion to identify alternatives to meet the needs of the ranchers while protecting the mouse. Suggested alternatives included maintaining current fencing to keep permitted cattle out of select riparian pastures during the time of year the mouse is active, additional monitoring, portable enclosures, and adding gates to the proposed fence.

No decision has been reached and further consideration of options is needed. Ms. Garcia stated, "This meeting was an important step to improve communications with the permittees and seek common ground on grazing management and the protection of endangered species. We intend to continue this dialogue to ensure any decision we reach is fully informed."

Ultimately, District Ranger Erik Taylor from the Jemez Ranger District will determine how to proceed. "I have a hard decision to make and I take this very seriously. My intent is to provide affirmative protection for the mouse while continuing a robust grazing program. I want our interests to be congruent and beneficial to the ranchers and the Forest Service," he said.

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